

Welsh Government Fisheries Division

Cockle Permit Conditions

The Cockle Fishing Management and Permitting (Specified Area)
(Wales) Order 2024

- **Whiteford Sands Cockle Fishery - 2026/2027 permitting period**

PLEASE NOTE: This document includes only the permit conditions that pertain to the Whiteford Sands cockle fishery, and forms part of the wording of the full Welsh Government Cockle Permit for the 2026/2027 permitting period. The full permit covers the entirety of the Specified Area and comprises this document and all other permit documents issued in respect of the other fisheries within the Specified Area. The full permit wording should be read with a valid email confirmation of permit approval with the permit-holder's unique permit reference number.

Any reference in this document to a 'permit' is to a full Welsh Government Cockle Permit as issued to a permit-holder for the 2026/2027 permitting period.

Welsh Government Cockle Permits are issued under the authority of the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, one of the Welsh Ministers, pursuant to the [Cockle Fishing Management and Permitting \(Specified Area\) \(Wales\) Order 2024](#) ('the Order'). The 'Specified Area' means cockle fisheries designated in the Order, as illustrated on [this](#) map.

The permit applies to a single person for a single permit period from **1 June 2026** to **31 May 2027**. The permit will enable the permit holder to fish for or take cockles from open cockle beds within the Specified Area during the permit period. A permit may not be transferred from one person to another.

All cockle beds are closed until they are assessed and declared open by the Welsh Ministers under articles 5 and 6 of the Order.

No person may fish for or take cockles or knowingly allow or assist another person to fish for or take cockles-

- (a) from a closed cockle bed, or
- (b) from an open cockle bed except and to the extent authorised by a permit,

unless they are a person exempted by article 14 of the Order.

A person who fishes for or takes cockles contrary to the provisions in the Order (including in contravention of a condition of a permit), must re-deposit the cockles on the cockle bed from which they were taken in accordance with instructions from a marine enforcement officer. When re-depositing cockles, the cockles must be spread thinly and evenly.

Part 1

Fixed permit conditions pertaining to all Welsh Government cockle fisheries within the Specified Area:

Requirement to check the status of a cockle bed

1. The permit holder must check the Welsh Government's website (www.gov.wales/cockles) each day to confirm a cockle bed is open before they fish for or take cockles from that cockle bed.

Prohibition on fishing at night

2. The permit holder must not fish for or take cockles or knowingly allow or assist another person to fish for or take cockles from a cockle bed between half an hour after sunset on any day and half an hour before sunrise on the following day.

Restriction on the use of vessels

3. The permit holder must not use a vessel over 10 metres in overall length when measured from bow to stern, when fishing for or taking cockles from a cockle bed.

Daily catch returns

4. The permit holder must submit a daily catch return to the Welsh Ministers within two days of the day on which those cockles were fished for or taken from a cockle bed. A daily catch return must record the date of each catch of cockles, the total live weight of all cockles gathered on that date, and the cockle bed from which the cockles were gathered. This can be done via the online permitting system: <https://www.gov.wales/submit-catch-return>

Gathering and sorting of cockles

5. The permit holder must sort and wash cockles before they are taken from the cockle bed and for these purposes, a cockle is deemed as taken from a cockle bed as soon as it is placed in a container (including bags, sacks, and other similar receptacles).
6. The permit holder must not have in their possession or vessel a net bag while on a cockle bed or use a net bag to gather cockles from a cockle bed. For the purposes of this condition, "net bag" means a flexible handheld device used to fish for or take cockles which has a rigid frame and a wide, open net.

Requirement to carry and produce the permit

7. The permit holder must carry their permit at all times (either in electronic or paper form) while gathering cockles from a cockle bed.

Part 2

Additional permit conditions pertaining to the Whiteford Sands cockle fishery.

Opening days

1. Cockles may be fished for and taken from the Whiteford Sands fishery only on the following days: Monday, Tuesday

Daily catch limit

2. The permit-holder must not take more than 350kg of cockles from the Whiteford Sands fishery in any one day.

Equipment for fishing

3. Cockle sacks up to a size of 25kg (approximately 45cm x 60cm) must be used to remove cockle from the cockle beds.
4. Identification tags for all sacks must be securely attached to the cockle sacks and the tags must clearly display the permit holder's permit number.
5. The use of tamps, or any other instrument used to fluidise the sand, is prohibited.

Minimum Landing Size

6. Gathering must be undertaken by hand or by rake using a fixed mesh sieve. Only cockles which are retained by a gauge having a square opening of **17.5mm** along each side of the square can be taken.

Harvestable surplus

7. Permit holders will be notified of the harvestable surplus once a stock survey and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the fishery have been completed.

Where there is evidence that the harvestable surplus has been fished or taken, the relevant area will be closed by the Welsh Government pursuant to article 7(1)(a) of 'The Cockle Fishing Management and Permitting (Specified Area) (Wales) Order 2024'.

Conditions required by the environmental assessment of the cockle bed

8. Boat-only removal. All cockle harvested within the Whiteford Sands fishery must be removed from the area by coded vessel only. No mechanically propelled land vehicles may access the cockle beds.
9. Permit holders must not dig, walk on, drive across, or park any vehicle on mussel beds or peat/clay exposures at Whiteford Sands fishery.

10. Permit holders must not fish for cockles in, walk through, drive through, enter, or otherwise approach areas of Whiteford Sands fishery that are being utilised by oystercatchers at the time the bed is accessed or during fishing.

Advisory notes for the Whiteford Sands cockle fishery

1. The Permit does not authorise the use of vehicles on or otherwise grant access to land bordering the Specified Area. This authorisation does not provide any defence to prosecution under any other legislation. It has no effect in relation to and will not provide a defence to any other legal provision or requirement, including any provision of the Road Traffic Act 1988 or any other legislation applying to the use of a vehicle.
2. In addition to other statutory provisions, you may be committing a criminal offence if you access or use a vehicle in the area and bordering areas without first obtaining the prior permission of all relevant landowners (and any other relevant bodies) over whose land you intend to travel. You should also note that unless each relevant landowner has carried out all assessments required under any relevant nature conservation or environmental legislation (for example under the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC)) before granting permission to use your vehicle in the specified area, you may still be committing a criminal offence even if you have the landowner's permission.
3. Permit holders should be aware that it is a legal requirement that each batch of cockles must be accompanied by a Registration Document (previously known as movement documents) when moved from the production area, i.e. the shellfish bed, or when first placed on the market. Registration Documents must be completed and include the gatherer's details, the bed from which the shellfish were gathered and the date, before the cockles are transported (in accordance with paragraph 3 of Chapter I: General Requirements for the Placing on the Market of Live Bivalve Molluscs to Section VII (Live Bivalve Molluscs) of Annex III to Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin). These documents can be obtained from Swansea Council using the following contact details:

Telephone: 01792 635600

Email: foodandsafety@swansea.gov.uk
4. Gathering cockles can be dangerous and brings with it a significant element of risk to personal safety. It is strongly recommended that you carry out your own health and safety and risk assessments before undertaking this activity. You are responsible for ensuring your own safety and for implementing appropriate control measures. Permit holders should familiarise themselves with, and follow, relevant health and safety guidance issued by competent authorities and other appropriate organisations.
5. Welsh Government will close the fishery to avoid an adverse effect on the integrity of a relevant protected site, or to assess the risk of adverse effect on the integrity of a relevant protected site (as defined by under Article 2 of the 2024 order).

6. Opening and closure declarations will be sent to all permit holders via email and will be published on the Welsh Government website and, whenever practicable, declarations will be placed in clearly visible locations on or near the cockle bed.
7. Unaccompanied bags of cockles should not be left on the cockle bed after gathering has concluded as they may be seen as abandoned. Any abandoned cockles will be returned to the cockle bed.
8. Permit holders are advised to hold liability insurance for any vessel used to gather cockles.
9. The area of water covering the Whiteford Sands cockle fishery is defined as “at sea”. A vessel involved in any manner with regard to the transportation of personnel, equipment or cargo for cockling in the area will be operating commercially. As such any vessel operating for commercial purposes, must comply with relevant United Kingdom Merchant Shipping Legislation (see Annex B).
10. Permit holders should act responsibly and respectfully while on or near the cockle beds. Anti-social behaviour, such as abusive language, intimidation, littering or any other disruptive conduct, is not acceptable.
11. It is your responsibility to be aware of the current classification of the gathering area. If sample results fail to meet the requirements for a Class C classification, the Food Standards Agency and relevant Local Authorities will prohibit cockle gathering in the affected area until the classification requirements are met.

You can view the current classification here: [Classification zone maps - Cefas \(Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science\)](#)

A person who contravenes the conditions of a permit is guilty of an offence under section 190 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. A person found guilty of an offence under that section is liable on summary conviction to a fine. In addition, the court may order the forfeiture of any fishing gear used in the offence and any sea fisheries resources in respect of which the offence was committed, or the payment of a sum of money representing the value of that fishing gear or resources.



Signed by Mark Alexander
Deputy Director – Fisheries
Date: 27 April 2026

Whiteford Sands area

In this section, a group of six or eight figures identifying or associated with any point represents the map co-ordinates of that point on the grid of the national reference system used by the Ordnance Survey on its maps and plans.

All latitude and longitude co-ordinates given are in degrees, minutes and decimal fractions of a minute and are co-ordinates of the World Geodetic System 1984.

Whiteford Sands

Defined as:

A straight line from position:

A). SS 4420 9826; 51° 39'.683 North, 004° 15'.233 West.

Thence in a straight line to position:

B). SS 4280 9422; 51° 37'.483 North, 004° 16'.35 West

Thence in a straight line to position:

C). SS 4472 9670; 51° 38'.85° North, 004° 14'.75 West

Thence along the line of Highest Astronomical Tides to position A above.

Map showing Whiteford Sands cockle fishery between the points Loughor Estuary, Hills Tor and Whiteford Point.





Maritime &
Coastguard
Agency

Cardiff Marine Office
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Anchor Court, Keen Road, Cardiff, CF245JW

www.gov.uk/mca
19 March 2026

GUIDANCE FOR VESSELS INVOLVED IN COCKLING OPERATIONS IN THE WHITEFORD SANDS COCKLE FISHERY

The area of the Whiteford Sands Cockle Fishery is beyond UK categorized water and it is defined as “at sea”.

A vessel involved in any manner with the transportation of personnel, equipment or cargo for cockling in the area will be operating commercially. All commercially operating vessels shall comply with the following legislation:

[SI 2023 No. 1216 - The Merchant Shipping \(Small Workboats and Pilot Boats\) Regulations 2023](#)

[The Workboat Code Edition 3](#)

Existing vessels that are certificated under the Brown Code, its equivalent standard published in the technical Annex to MGN 280(M), or Workboat Code Edition 2, Amendment 1 shall meet the requirements of the Code by the vessel’s next renewal examination or three years after the date of entry into force of the Code, whichever is later, except, where references to previous requirements are explicitly specified within individual sections of the Code they may comply with such requirements.

All cargo shall be stowed and secured in a manner which will not adversely affect the safe operation of the vessel. A vessel shall have adequate cargo support and securing arrangements appropriate for all intended modes of operation.

The “maximum number of persons on board” and “the maximum loading condition”, as indicated in the vessel WorkBoat Certificate, shall be always complied with.

Concerns for safety of Cockle vessels:

There have been reports of safety related incidents occurring on vessels operating in cockle beds. These incidents involve, overloading of cockles, carrying more people on board than certified to carry and operating the vessel without proper certification and/or without the required safety equipment. Additionally, grounding and stranding incidents are noted to be on the increase.

MCA wishes to work with ‘Cockle Gatherers and Gangmasters’ to collectively address these concerns, by effective engagement, monitoring of incidents, participating in multi-agency initiatives and carrying out enforcement actions where necessary.

